DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 285 261 EA 019 601

TITLE Tasks While Braiding the Rainbow Stripes: The Transition from Teacher to Administrator.
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Washington, DC, April 20-24, 1987).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrators; *Career Change; *Coping; Higher Education; Internship Programs; Management Development; Socialization; *Social Support Groups; *Training; *Transitional Programs
IDENTIFIERS Internships; *Ohio

ABSTRACT

First-year experiences in administration can color one's perceptions of the job, the career, and life goals. Ineffective socialization and assimilation during this period can also have serious consequences for staff, students, and community. This paper attempts to identify the significant issues, conflicts, and experiences occurring during the transition process undergone by inductees during their first year as school administrators. The study was limited to full-time high school teachers in transition as either assistant principals or as principals in Ohio. Seven participants were chosen for each of the major population categories (urban, suburban, and rural) and two participants were selected from a nonpublic system. Beginning in April 1986, participants were interviewed three times: before school began, after two months in administration, and at the end of the academic year. The first interview focused on expectations; the second on alterations in administrators' life and coping mechanisms; and the third on changes, coping strategies, and ideas for assistance. Interview results were analyzed using the Schlossberg model (a constant comparative approach) for analyzing adults in transition. Research findings will hopefully illuminate the teacher-to-administrator transition process so that a helpful framework for training and inducting new administrators can be developed. Included are 17 references. (MLH)

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TASKS WHILE BRAIDING THE RAINBOW STRIPES:

THE TRANSITION FROM TEACHER TO ADMINISTRATOR

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American Educational Research Association
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ABSTRACT

First impressions are often enduring ones. First year experiences in administration can color one's perceptions of the job, of the career, and of one's life goals. A negative experience can lead to unfortunate consequences, including departure from the job and the field. A positive first year experience can lead to heightened success for the individual, the potential for continued growth in the job and in the profession. The outcomes of the first year experience of a school administrator have serious consequences for staff, students and community. Effective socialization and personalization during the first year are not easily achieved.

The goal of this research study is to identify the significant issues, conflicts and experiences which occur during the transition process which the administrative inductee undergoes during her/his first year as a school administrator. The study has been limited to full-time high school teachers who are in transition to administration as either assistant principals or as principals in the State of Ohio. A sample of this population includes seven participants chosen from each of the major population categories — urban, suburban and rural — as well as two participants from a nonpublic system to provide for differing contextual characteristics. The seven participants were interviewed three times during their first year as administrators: first, before school began, a pretransition interview; second, after two months in administration, a transition interview; and third, after school was finished for the academic year, a posttransition interview. The study began in April of 1986.

The focus of the first interview was the expectations of the individual regarding the change from teaching to administration and the effects of this change on her/his life as well as the individual's expectations about coping with this career change. The second interview focused on the alterations in the individual's life which were occurring as a result of the transition; an exploration of the way in which the person perceives s/he was coping; as well as the person's suggestions about what might be helpful during this change. The focus of the final set of interviews included the changes that occurred as a result of the transformation; the means of coping; and ideas for assistance during the transition. The perspective of the individual in transition was sought throughout the study.

The results of the interviews will then be analyzed using the constant comparative approach for this qualitative research project. Data from this analysis will be employed: 1) to suggest changes in the content and process employed in training programs for administrators; 2) to strengthen the administrative internship program and experience; and 3) to form the basis for a support program for first year administrators.

First impressions are often enduring ones. First year experiences in administration can color one's perceptions of the job, of the career, and of one's life goals. The outcomes of the first year experience of a school administrator have serious consequences for staff, students and community. Yet effective socialization and personalization during the first year are not easily achieved.

The goal of my research study is to identify the significant issues, the conflicts and the experiences which occur during the transition process which the administrative inductee undergoes during her/his first year as a school administrator. The study has been limited to full-time high school teachers who are in transition to administration as either assistant principals or as principals in one state in the midwest. A sample of this population includes seven participants, representing each of the major population categories— urban, suburban and rural— as well as participants from the nonpublic system to provide for differing contextual characteristics. The seven participants are each being interviewed three times during their first year as administrators: they were first interviewed in August before school began; a second interview was conducted in October after two months in administration, the third interview will be held in June after the academic year is finished.

Data from this study will be used: (1) to suggest changes in the content and process employed in training programs for administrators; (2) to strengthen the administrative internship program and experience; and (3) to form the basis for a supportive induction program for first year administrators.

In our discussion today I would like to present two aspects of my study:

1. What the literature seems to predict will be significant issues regarding the first year experience of administrators; and then
2. I would like to share what I am finding so far in my study, having completed the preliminary analysis of two of the three sets of interviews.

Careers are like rainbows. They span a lifetime (Super, 1976) Like the stripes on the bow, careers contain stages. These may vary in prominence, in depth, and in attraction depending on both internal and external factors. One's understanding of the rainbow experience, as well as one's insight into one's career experience, will be shaped by the perspective which the viewer brings to this special phenomenon.

So, too, a study of the transition of the teacher-to-administrator must be placed within a context and analyzed from a particular point of view. The context includes concerns related to career development, issues involved in transitions and the implications of socialization issues for teachers in education. The point of view chosen throughout the study supports a discernment of the perspective of the individual being studied.

Let us examine the first context for this study, the literature related to career changes. The career literature provides three major approaches: theories of decision making; of career development and of occupational choice. These theories provide a helpful overarching framework within which three issues related to career change emerge: issues of advancement; of motivation and of the processing of career change. The career literature also points to the importance of theories of adult development for work in this field.

The second context for this study is that of transitions. In Nancy Schlossberg's terms, a transition is

> . . . any event or nonevent that results in change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and/or roles within the settings of self, work, family, health, and/or economics (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 43).

The transition situation itself can be characterized in the following ways; (1) patterns of managing have been disrupted; (2) problem-identification is often difficult; and (3) direction for rebuilding may be absent due to a questioning of one's sense of self. The individual in transition is, therefore, in stress. A period of both personal and relational change produces intense upset. The management of this transition is critical because the results can affect the life course of the individual (Weiss, 1976).

Further, Brammer and Abrego (1981) identify the following as problems of adult transitions: the planning and implementation of personal change; the building of external support systems; and the ability to cope with stress and depression.

> People in transition are likely to discover that their new situation is unshared by friends and kin and that the problems they face have become distinctly different from those occupying other members of their community. They may develop a sense of marginality to their community and, with this sense, feelings of social isolation (Weiss, 1976, p. 216).

One finds that the career transition itself is significant because important organizational boundaries are crossed. Both personal and organizational factors may impede successful career transitions. When an individual becomes accustomed to a familiar occupational pattern, changing that pattern may appear very risky if the outcomes are uncertain. As an organization, the school itself often places barriers in the way of professionals in transition to management. And as if that were not enough, the task of changing from teacher to administrator includes a role transition which involves a change in the individual's psychosocial assumptions. As a consequence, three key elements of the transition from teacher-to-administrator appear to include: (1) a belief that role transitions involve a change in the fundamental assumptions which have previously guided the individual's thoughts and actions; (2) an identification of both objective and subjective components; and (3) a perspective of role transitioning as a normal life occurrence (Sokol & Louis, 1984).

A third context for this study presents organizational socialization as a mechanism of transition. Socialization includes ". . . those changes caused by the organization that take place in newcomers" (Wanous, 1980, p. 168). Porter and Dubin (1975) describe three stages of passage which the individual experiences during the process of achieving membership. Each is different in terms of its impact on the person's adjustment.

> The Anticipatory Socialization stage takes place prior to organizational entry. Expectations and preconceived notions developed by the individual during this stage may aid or hinder subsequent adjustment to the organization. Several major classes of variables have been identified which may mediate the individual's initial experience with the organization during the Entry Socialization stage. These classes of variables include environmental, organizational, group, and task individual factors. The final socialization . . . is characterized by continued efforts on the part of the organization to induce changes in the individual in completing his or her transition to full-fledged organizational membership (Porter & Dubin, 1975, P. 4).

Because newcomers will also experience surprise in entering an unfamiliar organization as well as unmet expectations, additional strategies aimed at assisting the newcomers as they undergo the entry process need to be developed. These should take place on site and should consider the process of taking on as well as letting go of roles (Louis, 1980).

> A descriptively rich picture of the experience of entering a new organizational setting and role has been developed in the organizational literature on socialization. The experience is characterized by disorientation, foreignness, and a kind of sensory overload (Louis, 1980, p. 230).

What are the implications of these issues for educational transitions? Are career transitions in education cause for "disorientation, foreignness, and sensory overload?" Research on educational career mobility and on career patterns have described career changes in public school education. The issues of socialization and of induction in education must also be considered in order to address the question just posed.

Movement from teaching to administration has been described in terms of both organizational influence and individual influence on the change. Studies by Griffiths (1963) and by Blood (1966) reveal that decisions of teachers to become principals often occur early in their careers and that these teachers exhibit different behaviors and a different orientation. The different behavior was termed GASing because these teachers worked at Getting the Attention of Superiors in an effort to move up and out of the classroom. These teachers often assumed extra school-related nonteaching assignments which heightened their visibility. In this way people in positions of authority were influenced and ultimately served as sponsors.

Help from a sponsor is often critical in order to effect teacher-to-administrator mobility. In sponsored situations, teachers who wish to become Principals are selected by key district administrators. In this way, an elite status is extended to the teacher rather than earned by the teacher. Once a Principal, then the recently sponsored administrator becomes a sponsor for others (Wolcott, 1973). Other forms of entry into administration include the critical influence of informal groups which foster or dead-end a career (Ortiz, 1978); the paying of dues for entry into professional administration associations; the earning of state certification (Peterson & Finn, 1985); the screening, sponsoring and knowledge dissemination activities of universities (Wolcott, 1973); and just plain perseverance in the system (Achilles, 1984).

Once entry has occurred, behaviors that were employed by a teacher to achieve the position in administration are no longer needed. A career-oriented Principal avoids any behaviors that gained the attention of superiors, whether for positive or negative reasons. The goal now is to run a competent and efficient program that satisfies desperate "consumers."

> Not everyone assigned to the principal's office can sustain himself there; those who wish to abide successfully <u>in</u> the principalship must be able to abide <u>with</u> it. Survival does not seem to entail doing the job outstandingly well— no one can persistently satisfy so many individuals representing so many divergent interests— but rather doing it well enough to remain in the position at all. The process of surviving at times precludes principals from exhibiting those aspects of their work that they hope someday to see enhanced . . . . For example, ... <u>instructional leadership</u> and <u>agent of change</u> (Wolcott, 1973, p. 306).

Obviously, the difference in behaviors between the teacher seeking entry into administration and the principal in the role is the result of a major transformation. A great deal of this change occurs during the first, or the induction, year in administration. During induction, the individual self is involved in an adaptive process which leads to the abandoning of self to the purposes of the dominant social groups, and a subsequent change toward greater objectivity about the group as well as a greater objectivity about self. The early stages in the process have often been described as the "fragmentation of self."

Studies of the socialization of school administrators have demonstrated: (1) the Principal's behavior correlated with school district principal behaviors rather than with school climates of their buildings, indicating the role socialization influence of the district; (2) Principals acted out of a bureaucratic role in conformity to role prescription; and (3) attitudes, behaviors and values are systematically altered during the transition from teaching to administration (Blood, 1966). Behavior, role enactment, attitudes and values all change during administrative socialization (Ortiz, 1976). In addition,

> Socialization processes in the development of an educational administration career are severe at certain junctures (Ortiz, 1979, p. 22).

This is the case because the acts of socialization agents are sometimes contradictory. Socialization of the administrator occurs, often in negative fashion, while opportunities for positive strategies are neglected. The educational administration internship experience is a case in point.

> In education . . . many a new principal is "handed the keys" and given full responsibility for a building, even a cluster of buildings, without ever having engaged in the practice of school administration under the watchful eye and with the supporting hand of a seasoned professional. With luck, the bureaucratic structure of a school system will ensure that the new principal was once an assistant principal . . . But only by happenstance do those supportive administrative roles include good supervision or an understudy relationship with an outstanding leader. Indeed, if one was the assistant principal in charge of discipline, . . . one might never have helped direct the central/educational activities of the institution or observed much of the daily work of teachers. A tiny fraction of the nation's 15,000 local school systems consciously "grow their own" future leaders by placing promising candidates in intern-like settings and by supplying special training opportunities (Peterson & Finn, 1985, pp. 53-54).

Principals new in the position acknowledge their limitations as the Daresh study has revealed. The needs of beginning administrators are becoming more and more apparent. Further exploration of the first-year experience in greater depth and over a span of time is a continuing and critical need.

Because the capacity of adults to cope with changes in their lives is an extraordinarily complex reality, the study of the transition process itself demands that an analysis of individual and of external occurrences be simultaneously accomplished (Schlossberg, 1981). For this reason, the researcher has chosen to conduct this study of the high school teacher in transition to administrator using the Schlossberg model for analyzing adults in transition.

In this way, the study seeks answers to three questions:

1. What kinds of change do individuals in transition from teaching to administration perceive themselves as facing? Do these shift within the first year?
2. What strategies do they perceive themselves employing in order to cope with these changes?
3. How do these individuals appraise their own use of these coping strategies?

My second goal in this presentation today includes sharing some of what I have found so far in my study. I will limit this discussion to the three major questions just presented and will present the issues as they are evolving from the two interviews completed in August and in October.

Question 1: How do you think your change from teaching to administration will alter your life? brought the following responses in late August:

The new administrators talked about expectations in terms of personal change, task and job changes and social changes.

In October, respondents indicated that the change from teaching to administration so far had actually involved the following:

A preoccupation with the job; a new enthusiasm, enjoyment, challenge in life; greater time demands; a difference in busy-ness (interrupted, unstructured, hectic and tiring); a changed relationship with the faculty and a measuring of self against job demands to gain a sense of fit.

Personal changes at this point centered on change in family situations; change in self-insight and increasing self-esteem while at the same time the change had heightened an awareness of the negatives of being in administration. Four of the seven indicated a negative change in their health— due to loss of sleep, to less exercise, and to an increase in activity and stress.

In terms of task or job changes— little was said in October. A shift in focus occurred with some concerns for role changes:

In relationships with coworkers; in attempts at manipulation of them by others; and in a personal hesitancy to ask appropriate questions. In their relationships with superiors, the inductee found that the relationship depended on the previous relationships, often old perceptions remained; still called "coach" or the relationship was experienced as evolving. Age differences were often felt as barriers, there was also a sense of deepened support.

In terms of the gaining and loss of roles, all seven new administrators identified additional roles both internal and external to the school. The greatest sense of loss occurred in terms of ongoing relationships with a specific group of students for whom the individual had been responsible. Other losses included close relationships with family. Most saw the teaching role as broadened, not lost during the change to administration.

Question 2. When asked in August — How do you expect to cope with this change in your career? new administrators expectations included:

Working hard, keep learning, take things slowly; building cooperation throughout the institution, learning from mistakes and failures, being organized, anticipating problems; and keeping a calendar to cut down on surprises the next year.

When asked in October— How have you been coping with this change in your career? They indicated that their coping took several forms— both internal and external. Some spoke of intellectual, thoughtful or prayerful approaches; of attempts to balance negatives with positives and of taking time and space away; while other approaches included enjoying the hectic pace; finding release in sports and emoting at home or with friends. One was too tired at night to think or to worry.

Question 3: How do these individuals appraise their own use of coping strategies? How do they feel about the change and how they will or are managing it?

In August, the administrators talked about: a sense of success, of seeing oneself as perceived to be an administrator; having a sense of awesome responsibility; as feeling as though they were starting all over again; as grateful for previous administrative experiences; and as hopeful.

In October, I received the following responses to the same question:

Individuals felt positive about the change for both personal and professional reasons:

Personal reasons included personal growth, a sense of personal competence, and the "deliverance" from a previous, negative, confining situation.

Professional reasons included enjoying the professional activities; the challenges; and the opportunity to use skills and talent. The job came at a good time for career advancement needs for some.

Negative feelings were related to the loss of one's previous support system.

Additional questioning in October revealed that all seven administrators felt that a support system was critical and desirable. They desired help from individuals who had previously had the job, with people who were peers with whom they could exchange ideas, experiences, frustrations; and with veterans, someone who knew the ropes and had survived and with whom they could talk. In addition, these high school teachers turned administrators indicated that an ongoing support system, an in-service program should be in place. They also indicated that opportunities for space, for fun, for time away would be saving as the job is constant.

Of what value is the surfacing of these issues and the charting of concerns? A study of the perceptions of secondary teachers in transition to administration is of value in terms of its potential for expanding research in the areas of career development and advancement, of adult transition and role transition theory, and in its potential for enhancing the work of both practitioners and professors of educational administration.

If the findings of this research can illuminate the process of teacher-to-administrator transitions so that a helpful framework can be employed in the training and induction of administrators and so that the transition experience can remain hopeful in spite of the inherent stress, then an important personal goal of this researcher will have been attained.

> . . . the final evaluation of a transition is based on the answers to such questions as these: Can the individual now invest and commit himself or herself to work, love and play? Can the individual be helped to reinvest and renew now that internal or external events and nonevents have interrupted the persons or activities that have given meaning to his or her life? This is really what the transition process is all about— a curiosity, excitement, and hope about the future even when the present may be a time of sorrow. Helpers need to keep this firmly in mind if they are to help adults be kind to themselves— and hopeful (Schlossberg, 1984, p.66).

This presentation ends then, with an expression of confidence that this research will be able to identify through a study of the teacher-to-administrator transition those necessary Tasks which must be accomplished while the individual Braids the personal and professional issues that are a part of the Rainbow Stripes of her/his Career. Are not rainbows a sign of hope after all?

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